

WASHINGTON, D.C. Yesterday, Congressman Sanford Bishop signed a petition that would force the entire House of Representatives to consider a proposal that would give the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices on behalf of seniors enrolled in Medicare. This provision was eliminated from the Republican Medicare legislation signed into law at the end of last year.

“We will not let the outrage of our seniors fall on deaf ears,” said Congressman Bishop. “For years the appeal has been simple: a real Medicare prescription drug benefit that is affordable, universal and guaranteed. Instead my Republican colleagues handed our seniors a confusing plan that prohibits the Secretary of Health and Human Services from negotiating lower drug prices on behalf of the 40 million seniors enrolled in Medicare.”

Currently, the Veterans’ Administration (VA) and private insurance companies negotiate for lower drug prices on behalf of their membership. Families USA, a non-profit, non-partisan organization estimates that the VA has saved as much as 40% on the drugs most commonly used by seniors. If enacted, the “Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act of 2004” (HR. 3767) would work to duplicate such success for the benefit of the more than 40 million seniors currently enrolled in Medicare.

“Allowing the government to negotiate drug discounts is a common sense measure that could mean substantial savings. It is unconscionable that many are being forced to choose between purchasing food and medication, just as it is unconscionable that ensuring profits for drug companies would be prioritized over making prescription drugs affordable for our seniors,” said Congressman Bishop. “I will continue to fight for a real Medicare prescription drug benefit. Signing this discharge petition is a step in that direction.”

The purpose of a discharge petition is to force a bill out of committee for consideration by the full House of Representatives and requires the signatures of a majority of the Members of Congress (218) to be successful.